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SOME BIRD OBSERVATIONS MADE AT THE ABROLHOS ISLANDS

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The following remarks are based on observations made in August 1953, and on information given me by local crayfishermen. During my stay in the Southern Group, of the Abrolhos Islands, I made a trip to an islet of the Mangrove Islands, situated at the northern end of Pelsart Island. Several of these bear local names which appear to vary from time to time. One of these, Fin Island, also called Brad Island, was visited on August 11. The main island, Pelsart, was visited on August 13.

Crested Tern, *Sterna bergii* Lichtenstein

A breeding colony, at the northern end of Fin Island, in which over 150 adults were counted, was inspected. Many birds were absent fishing so that the strength of the colony was estimated at some 200 pairs. Chicks were present but it was impossible to guess at the number because those that were not hidden in the low vegetation would "freeze" to the ground and become indistinguishable among the broken coral. When disturbed the adults would pack and drive their chicks into the closest patches of vegetation, while at the seaward edge of the rookery the chicks usually jumped into the sea, from as high as 4 feet, and swam away, often attended by hovering parents. The chicks appeared to be from a week to a fortnight old.

Five eggs were given me by a local fisherman. He had collected them between July 6 and 10, when each "had a red streak in it", so incubation had evidently begun by that time. This record of early breeding is interesting in view of the fact that Serventy and Whittell (*Birds of Western Australia*, 1951, p. 131) give November as the breeding month at the Abrolhos. The present record indicates a prolonged nesting season in that area, but it still falls within the spring-breeding category of Serventy (*The Emu*, vol. 52, 1952, p. 51) in his review of the nesting seasons of Western Australian sea-birds. No autumn-breeding populations of the species have been noted on the west coast, south of Sharks Bay.

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The eggs were stated to represent the different types that the fisherman had observed in the rookery. They certainly showed a great diversity in pattern. The figures for length and breadth are given in millimetres: 69.0 x 41.5, 59.5 x 42.3, 60.5 x 42.9, 61.5 x 42.0 and 64.0 x 41.2.

Adults continuously brought small fish back to the chicks. When an adult returned with a fish several chicks might stumble towards it but they would be ignored, the parent either seeking out its own chick or standing calling until it came. A pair standing with their chick savagely attacked a strange chick which approached them.

Red-tailed Tropic-bird, *Phaethon rubricaudus* Boddaert

Two dead birds were found between the tourist camp and the loading jetty on Pelsart Island. They were beside a bush under which fishermen had seen this species nesting. Both birds had the flesh torn from the top of the head and the back of the neck; the eyes were missing also. The fishermen claimed that the damage was done by "fish eagles" or Ospreys, although no one had ever seen either attack a Tropic-bird. Mr. J. H. Calaby (C.S.I.R.O. Wildlife Survey Section) considered that the damage was not typical of birds of prey, but he considered it characteristic of rat attack. The following measurements of the birds in millimetres, were made: (a), culmen, 67.5; toe, 59; tarsus, 33; wing, 358; tail, 112, with streamers measuring 438 and 454; (b), culmen, 64.6; toe, 51; tarsus, 31; wing, 340, and tail, 110, with developing streamers 300 and 180. Cephalopod remains were found in the stomachs of both birds.

One of the dead birds contained a fully developed egg in its oviduct. The only other Tropic-bird seen was hovering over the nesting site and may have been the mate of the dead bird containing the egg.

Fishermen claimed that two pairs had been seen nesting in September 1952 and one pair in January 1953. There may have been more as "about a dozen" Tropic-birds had been seen at this time. This claim of the presence of a comparatively large number of Tropic-birds in 1953 is interesting in view of the fact that a fisherman said he had shot 16 of what he described as "fish eagles" between April and June 1952 at Pelsart Island.

Lesser Noddy, *Anous tenuirostris* Temminck

I was unable to visit the breeding site of these birds but, as we left Pelsart Island at sunset, numerous fishing parties each of several hundred Noddies were flying towards the mangroves where they are reputed to nest. This supports the suggestion of Serventy and Whittell (*Birds of Western Australia*, p. 141) that the species is resident at the Abrolhos and not migratory as is the Common Noddy (*Anous stolidus*). No individuals of the Common Noddy nor of the Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*) were seen at the time of my visit.